



Health at Every Size



Sustainable Agriculture

Linda Bacon, PhD

August 11, 2009

Dear Dr. Dietz,

I am a nutrition professor, researcher, author of the book *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight*, and a member of the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) and the Association for Size Diversity and Health (ASDAH). I had the privilege of sharing the air with you recently (8/3/09) on the Seattle NPR station KUOW¹.

I was thrilled to hear that you believe that people can be healthy at every weight, and I also appreciated your emphasis that “everybody needs to be part of the solution – everybody could be more healthy.”

My concern is that there is a disconnect between this sentiment and the way many of the CDC’s programs and policies are framed around weight rather than health. For example, your LEAN Works website and Obesity Cost Calculator is predicated on the assumption that weight determines employee costs, denying the possibility that many heavier people make good health choices and live long, healthy lives – and that many “normal weight” people are at metabolic risk due to poor lifestyle choices². I am concerned that this program will do much more to increase workplace discrimination³ against “overweight” and “obese” employees and especially harm people of color, than it will to support people of any size in making healthy choices.

Members of NAAFA and ASDAH would like to make themselves available as resources to you so that the CDC can develop public health programs and messages that are focused on health rather than weight, in the spirit of Health at Every Size (HAES).

NAAFA is a non-profit civil rights organization dedicated to ending size discrimination. We believe that the key to reduced health care costs lies in promoting healthy lifestyle choices for all employees, regardless of weight. We would like to encourage the CDC to reorient its policies and programs to a focus on good health for all, rather than reinforcing stereotypes and increasing stigmatization, which ironically result in poorer health outcomes for heavier people. A large body of research, including my own⁴, indicates that a focus on health, not weight, improves health outcomes⁵.

ASDAH is an international professional organization committed to the principles of Health At Every Size. Our mission is to promote education, research, and the provision of services which enhance health and well-being, and which are free from weight-based assumptions and weight discrimination.

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NAAFA (www.NAAFA.org) and ASDAH (www.SizeDiversityandHealth.org) have many community and professional members who can provide data and guidance supporting the CDC's transition from the current weight-based focus to a clear, consistent health message for all. We would like to be included in the design and execution of programs that impact our health, in the spirit of "nothing about us, without us." You would not talk about issues that affect urban America without those who live, work, and support urban America as part of the conversation. You can achieve one of the basic principles of public health by including the community at the table.

We would like to set up a conference call with you and/or others at CDC's Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Division to discuss HAES and specific ideas regarding how NAAFA and ASDAH can collaborate with CDC moving forward. I am also including a copy of NAAFA's Size Diversity Toolkit and a book that I authored.

I am currently best available by e-mail. I will return to my office on 9/9/09, and can be reached by phone after that date. (Contact info in footer of letter.)

We look forward to the next step!

Warmly,

Linda Bacon, PhD

Note: this letter was approved by the leadership of NAAFA and ASDAH and represents the perspective of both organizations.

¹ <http://www.kuow.org/mp3high/mp3/Conversation/Conversation20090803.m3u>

² Sims, E. (2001) Are there persons who are obese, but metabolically healthy? *Metabolism*, 50:1499-1504.

³ Solovay, S. (2000) *Tipping the Scales of Justice*. NY: Prometheus Books, Puhl, R. and Brownell, K. (2006) Confronting and Coping with Weight Stigma: An Investigation of Overweight and Obese Adults. *Obesity*, 14:1802-1815, Latner, J. et al. (2008) . Weighing obesity stigma: the relative strength of different forms of bias. *International Journal of Obesity*, 32, 1145-1152.

⁴ Bacon, L. et al. (2005) Size acceptance and intuitive eating improve health for obese, female chronic dieters. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 105:929-936.

⁵ Gaesser, G. (2002) *Big Fat Lies: The Truth about Your Weight and Your Health*. Carlsbad, CA: Gurze.

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